

Advice to my son
poem analysis,
summary. by peter
meinke essay



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One of the great paradoxes in life is trying to impart wisdom that you've garnered in your own life to others while letting them retain their own identity. I have found in my own life, as many others have found in theirs, that it can be difficult to learn vicariously through another person, rather than having to learn from your own life experiences. Still though, there is probably not a single person who would say that if they had the knowledge and wisdom that they currently have at a young age, would not do some things differently.

As such, every parent faces the difficult conundrum of trying to pass down to their children that which they have learned in their life in a way that is both relevant and convincing but also allows for the fact that their children are going to have to learn many of these lessons for themselves. Peter Meinke sets out to do just this in his poem "Advice to My Son". It is a heartfelt poem, which is beautiful both in how succinct it is, and also deep and powerful the advice really is. In it he not only tackles important day to day advice, but he also helps his son to resolve a question that lies at the heart of the contrast between the thinking of an older, wiser parent, and a younger, more naive child. Should we live each day in the present, or spend our days preparing for the future? Wikipedia defines Juxtaposition as "A placing or being placed in nearness or contiguity, or side by side, often done in order to compare/contrast the two, to show similarities or differences.

In the first stanza, the author starts by illuminating the juxtaposition between the temporal and the long term. He says to live your days as if each one may be your last, essentially saying that you need to savor the moment and appreciate the present, because the present is the only thing that we

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are guaranteed. He explains why by saying that our lives go by quickly, and there are many unfortunate events that befall people every day which end lives unexpectedly. Then, however, he says that at the same time that you are savoring the moment, you should also think ahead and plan for the future. After all, he says, life can go slowly if you survive those horrible events that might befall you in destiny's attempt to end your life early. And if you survive, he explains, you will end up in the lifestyle that so many of us are stuck in, and place that is not blissful and enjoyable like heaven but not painful and horrific like hell, more like a sort of existential purgatory.

In saying this I also think he might be trying to show the difference between a secular life lacking in mystery, and a spiritual life, which contains a greater variety of thoughts and emotions. In the second stanza, the author tackles the opposing ideals of the practical and the ephemeral. In order to do this, he incorporates the images of plants. He uses the rose to symbolize the idealistic, the beauty that fades with time, and the short-lived. It is a good example, for as soon as a rose is clipped it begins to die. As a symbol of the practical he uses "squash, spinach, turnips, and tomatoes".

These represent things that are not beautiful and useful in the present, but that will be nourishing in satisfying the essential need for food that we all have. So he is saying that while you are going around appreciating the things that are pleasurable and beautiful in the moment, you must also do things which will yield positive results in the future even if they are not immediately satisfying. He then goes on to talk of the juxtaposition of the sensual and the intellectual. He examines beauty as a sort of nectar, a comparison that is striking because of how immediately satisfying both are to experience. He <https://assignbuster.com/advice-to-my-son-poem-analysis-summary-by-peter-meinke-essay/>

says that “ in a desert, nectar saves” meaning that finding that beauty in life is what will make your days sweet, and in difficult times, can literally save you.

But, he says, the reality is that you will need more than just temporary beauty. He says that you can't survive purely on nectar (the sensual); you need more nutritious sustenance (the intellectual). So while you should marry a girl who is beautiful to you, you should also take the time to meet her mother. This way you will see how she is likely to turn out as you both grow older, her looks begin to fade and her personality continues to develop.

In doing so you will make sure you have the kind of sustenance that will continue to enrich your life for years to come, and not just in the present moment. After this he has two lines which seem disconnected from the stanza, but contain a powerful message. He says “ speak truth to one man, work with another”. I believe he is emphasizing both having integrity and a strong work ethic. This is important, especially the part about integrity, because so much of this poem is focused on the the self. Attaining pleasure in the present, insuring security in the future.

Alone, these goals may lead on to engage in actions that are not moral in order to succeed, so in this one line he says that one must always have integrity when dealing with those around him. Having a strong work ethic and employing the help of your fellow man is also important. No man is a mountain, and life is too difficult to have to rely only on yourself without any outside help. The ability to work alongside others to accomplish things in life is a valuable skill, which he illustrates.

The final two lines of the poem resonate with me more than any other. He says: “...

always serve bread with your wine...but, son, always serve wine” With two eloquent sentences he lays out perfectly the answer to the age old question of whether to live in the present or prepare for the future. He says to serve bread with your wine. By this he means that in addition to having that appreciation for the present, that lust for life, that taste for the pleasant in life, you should also take care of the things in life that might not be so immediately pleasurable, but are sustaining over the long-term. Often when arguing a position, you will begin with a quick synopsis of the opposing view and it’s validity. This is done to acknowledge the value in holding that opposing view and also to show that extremism is never a healthy ideology.

Ultimately though, you go on to express the side of the issue you believe to be more correct. Peter Meinke does this in this poem, as he first lays out the necessity of engaging in the activities that result in long-term survival, but then expressing what he considers to be more important. The idea of always serving wine is that of making sure that above all you make sure to savor life, enjoy the moment, and capture the beauty of life, just as this poem has captured the beauty of passing down to your son the lessons of your life so that he too, does not let a day pass in which he lays the groundwork for a better future while, most importantly, savoring the wine that is the beauty inherent in each and every day.